

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 04476 161312Z
ACTION NEA-10

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FOR DRAPER FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, SY US
SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWRY:MARRIAGE PROPOSALS AND
PAROLE

REF: STATE 166484, 165514
DAMASCUS 4475

HEREWITH IS TEXT OF PAPER I SUBMITTED TO DAOUDY
TODAY UNDER COVERING LETTER DISCRIBED TO ATHERTON
IN DAMASCUS REFTEL:

QTE

INTEREST IN THE SITUATION OF SOME 500 SYRIAN JEWISH
WOMEN WISHING TO MARRY BUT UNABLE TO FIND ELIGIBLE
JEWISH HUSBANDS IN SYRIA GREW WITH THE VISITS OF CONGRESSMEN
WAXMAN AND SOLARZ TO DAMASCUS IN THE LATTER PART OF 1976
JEWISH COMMUNITY LEADERS WITH WHOM THEY MET TOLD THEM
THAT THIS WAS THE MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEM WHICH THE COMMUNITY
FACED IN SYRIA. THEY TOOK BACK TO THE UNITED STATES THE
VIEW THAT THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE FOR SYRIAN JEWS WERE
MUCH BETTER THAN MANY AMERICANS HAD BEEN LED TO BELIEVE;
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 04476 161312Z

BUT THEY ALSO RETURNED DETERMINED TO WORK ON THE PROBLEM
OF JEWISH WOMEN UNABLE TO FIND HUSBANDS.

IN JANUARY, THE U.S. EMBASSY IN DAMASCUS WAS INFORMED
BY THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS THAT A PRESIDENTIAL
DECREE HAD BEEN ISSUED JANUARY 10 STATING THAT UNMARRIED
SYRIAN JEWISH WOMEN WOULD BE ALLOWED TO APPLY FRO PERMISSION

TO MARRY FOREIGNERS IN THE SAME MANNER AS OTHER SYRIAN CITIZENS. IN WASHINGTON, Owing TO THE GREAT CONCERN BEING EXPRESSED TO THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE ON THIS ISSUE BY THE CONGRESS, THIS INFORMATION WAS GIVEN TO A NUMBER OF KEY CONGRESSMEN. IT WAS WELL RECEIVED AND CONTRIBUTED TO THE FAVORABLE COMMENTS MADE AT HEARINGS BEFORE THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES LAST MARCH.

IN MARCH 1977, TWO PROMINENT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN NEW YORK WHOSE FAMILIES HAD ORIGINALLY COME FROM SYRIA VISITED DAMASCUS, ALEPO AND QAMISHLI FOR THE PURPOSE OF VISITING RELATIVES, REESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY GENERALLY, AND PARTICULARLY TO ASSIST, FOLLOWING TRADITIONAL CUSTOM, IN ARRANGING MARRIAGES BETWEEN SYRIAN JEWISH WOMEN AND ELIGIBLE JEWISH MEN IN THE UNITED STATES. THEY MET AND TALKED WITH MANY UNMARRIED WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

UPON RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES, THEY ARRANGED MARRIAGES WITH A NUMBER OF AMERICAN JEWISH MEN WHO CONSEQUENTLY WROTE FORMAL PROPOSALS OF MARRIAGE TO SPECIFIED SYRIAN JEWISH WOMEN. THESE PROPOSALS WERE SWORN TO AND NOTARIZED BY AUTHORIZED AMERICAN OFFICIALS AND CERTIFIED BY THE SYRIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON. THEY WERE SENT TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL IN DAMASCUS DURING JUNE-
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 04476 161312Z

JULY 1977. TO DATE, TWELVE SUCH PROPOSALS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED AND PRESENTED BY THE JEWISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL TO THE APPROPRIATE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES FOR APPROVAL.

THE TWO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN NEW YORK RETURNED TO SYRIA IN JULY 1977 IN THE HOPES OF ESCORTING SOME OF THESE 12 YOUNG WOMEN BACK TO NEW YORK AND ALSO TO ARRANGE ADDITIONAL MARRIAGES IN THE FUTURE. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT UNDERSTANDS THAT ADDITIONAL MARRIAGE PROPOSALS MAY BE FORTHCOMING.

FURTHERMORE, SEVERAL AMERICAN JEWISH MEN HAVE COME TO SYRIA TO MEET AND MARRY SYRIAN JEWISH WOMEN. THE EMBASSY IS AWARE OF ONE SPECIFIC PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES BUT APPROVAL HAS NOT YET BEEN GRANTED. MEANWHILE, THE MAN IN QUESTION HAS SPENT MORE THAN A MONTH IN SYRIA AT A HEAVY EXPENSE TO HIMSELF. BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTY AND EXPENSE INVOLVED FOR THE ORDINARY AMERICAN CITIZEN TO LEAVE HIS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAVEL TO SYRIA FOR PROLONGED PERIODS, IT IS EXPECTED THAT MOST MARRIAGE PROPOSALS WILL BE MADE THROUGH WRITTEN AND NOTARIZED

POWERS OF ATTORNEY RATHER THAN ACTUAL TRAVEL TO SYRIA.

OWING TO THE GREAT INTEREST WHICH THIS ISSUE HAS
AROUSED IN THE UNITED STATES, AS WELL AS HIS OWN HUMANI-
TARIAN CONCERN, PRESIDENT CARTER RAISED THIS ISSUE WITH
PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD IN GENEVA IN MAY 1977. PRESIDENT
AL-ASSAD'S RESPONSE, AS THE U.S. UNDERSTOOD IT, WAS THAT
SUCH CASES WOULD BE EXAMINED ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS. THE
WHITE HOUSE HAS BEEN KEPT FULLY INFORMED OF EACH STEP IN
THE ISSUE OF THE MARRIAGE PROPOSALS SINCE THE GENEVA
MEETING.

THE EMBASSY THEREFORE HOPES THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC WILL GIVE EXPEDITIOUS AND FAVORABLE
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PAGE 04 DAMASC 04476 161312Z

CONSIDERATION TO THE TWELVE CASES ALREADY PRESENTED, AS
WELL AS OTHER SUCH CASES WHICH MAY IN THE FUTURE BE PRESENTED,
TO PERMIT THE SYRIAN WOMEN WHO HAVE RECEIVED PROPOSALS OF
MARRIAGE TO DEPART SYRIA FOR THE PURPOSE OF JOINING
THEIR PROSPECTIVE HUSBANDS IN THE UNITED STATES. SYRIAN
AGREEMENT IN THIS HUMANITARIAN MATTER CANNOT HELP BUT
STRENGTHEN THE EXISTING FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE
SYRIAN AND AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS AND PEOPLE.

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